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Rachael Leigh Cook

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THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

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PRAYER LURES INT'L BUYERS

By Pamela McClintock

Sam Worthington and Odeya Rush's international action-thriller *The Hunter's Prayer* has presold in a raft of international markets, as well as snagging new castmembers **Martin Compston**, **Amy Landecker** and **Veronica Echegui**.



Worthington

Jonathan Mostow (*Terminator 3*, *U-571*) is directing the film adaptation of **Kevin Wignall's** critically acclaimed novel, *For the Dogs*, with **Sierra/Affinity** representing international rights. **Paul Leyden**, **Oren Moverman**, **John Brancato** and **Michael Ferris** wrote the adapted script.

Hunter's Prayer stars Worthington as a solitary assassin hired to kill Rush's character. But his plans go awry after the two develop a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Friend Stepping Behind Camera

By Scott Roxborough

British actor **Rupert Friend** (*Homeland*, *The Young Victoria*) will make his feature debut as a director with *Barton & Charlie & Checco & Bill*, which he wrote and also will star in.

Emily Blunt is in negotiations to co-star in the film, which is set to begin shooting in spring 2015.



Blunt

Friend will play **Barton**, a con man who meets **Charlie** (Blunt), a woman who could change his life, whom he offers to teach the tricks of the grifter trade. They start off on a road trip, pursued by conned newspaper mogul **Bill**, and are joined by **Checco**, a 10-year-old

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Joaquin Phoenix signs autographs as he arrives at Saturday's AFI Film Fest gala screening of *Inherent Vice* at the Egyptian Theatre.

Your Movie Better Open Big at Home

After a number of buzzy titles at last year's market bombed at the domestic box office (*Railway Man* anyone?), dealmakers are watching U.S. performance like never before By Scott Roxborough, Pamela McClintock

The successful launch of actor **Jake Gyllenhaal's** drama *Nightcrawler* at the U.S. box office — the film debuted at number one for the week of Oct. 31-Nov. 6 with \$14.2 million — was greeted by sighs of relief by the foreign buyers crowding the halls of the Loews Hotel for AFM. *Nightcrawler* was one of the big presales hits of last year for **Sierra/Affinity** but buyers who picked up the film based on the script and Gyllenhaal's name knew box-office success was far from a sure thing. A dark drama from first-time director **Dan Gilroy** set in the underworld of L.A. crime reporters, the film is not most distributors' idea of a bulletproof hit. The "number one in the U.S." label goes a long way to convincing theaters in Berlin, Sydney or Tokyo to take the risk and book the movie.

"If it opens at number one or number two it makes a big difference, especially for films that could go in a more art house direction," says **Herbert L. Kloiber**, managing director of **Tele-Munchen Group (TMG)**, which pre-bought *Nightcrawler* last year. "Theaters everywhere are all looking at how a movie does in the U.S. before they decide to take it."

This wasn't always the case. Time was, an A-list cast and a certain budget level was enough to guarantee international box office, even if a film's domestic performance fell flat. No longer. Films like **Liam Neeson-**

starrer *A Walk Among Tombstones*, **Colin Firth/Nicole Kidman** period drama *The Railway Man*, **Rowan Joffe's** *Before I Go to Sleep* with Firth, Kidman and **Mark Strong**, and **Pierce Brosnan** actioner *The November Man* are only a sampling of recent titles whose presales were red hot at AFM — only to go ice cold at the box office worldwide. Having been burned before, foreign buyers are increasingly wary of committing to major releases without the backwind of a strong U.S. start.

"For the right film, a U.S. launch will always be impactful," says **Sierra/Affinity** chief **Nick Meyer**. "When the U.S. market is one of the first territories to release a film, it is always better for foreign buyers and licensing agents to have a so-called 'running start'."

And for international buyers, nothing beats the gold standard of a major studio release. After **Warner Bros.** scooped up North American rights to **Shane Black's** upcoming detective thriller *The Nice Guys*, starring **Russell Crowe** and **Ryan Gosling**, **Alex Walton** and **Ken Kao's** sales group **Bloom** quickly closed the rest of the world. Kloiber of **TMG**, which bought *Nice Guys* for Germany, says **Warner Bros.' attachment** was key. "You've seen a lot of U.S. indie distributors buy films only to release them only on VOD or as a platform

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

THR HEAT INDEX



JAMES FRANCO

Numerous foreign buyers have put in offers for Franco-starrer *Michael*, the biopic of **Michael Glatze**, who denounced his homosexuality and became a pastor. Exchange is repping the film internationally.



ANDY DICK

Dick, who stars alongside **Danny Trejo** and **Eric Roberts** in Archstone Distribution's AFM title *L.A. Slasher*, was arrested Friday for allegedly stealing a \$1,000 necklace.

KNOW YOUR DEALMAKERS



BILL JOHNSON & JIM SEIBEL
Lotus co-founders

Johnson and Seibel's *Tiger's Curse*, based on **Colleen Houck's** bestselling YA novel, is generating strong sales at AFM. Saturday night, Johnson threw bash at his Los Angeles home for foreign buyers, and the special guest was a real-life bengal tiger.

MEANWHILE, IN THE REAL WORLD ...

► **Matt Damon** has confirmed that he'll reteam with director **Paul Greengrass** for another installment of the Jason Bourne franchise.

► **Nuri Bilge Ceylan's** *Winter Sleep* (Turkey), **Andrey Zvyagintsev's** *Leviathan* (Russia), **Lars von Trier's** *Nymphomaniac Director's Cut* (Denmark), **Pawel Pawlikowski's** *Ida* (Poland) and **Ruben Ostlund's** *Force Majeure* (Sweden) are the five nominees for the best European film at this year's European Film Awards.

► **Jay Leno** will be the final guest on *The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson* on Dec. 19.

Open Big

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

release, so it makes a big difference having a studio onboard, with a big print commitment."

Warner Bros. has clearly shown its confidence in *Nice Guys*, giving it a prime summer berth for its domestic release on June 17, 2016.

Similarly, the fact that *The Water Diviner*, **Russell Crowe's** directorial debut, will go out via Warners — the studio did the deal at AFM earlier this week — goes a long way to calm the nerves of foreign buy-

ers that had snatched up the title from Mister Smith Entertainment after seeing the first 12 minutes of footage in Cannes.

"It's a \$30 million film with **Russell Crowe**, so people were pretty confident it would work anyway but the [WB] deal definitely helps," says Mister Smith's **David Garrett**. "There's no certainty in the business anymore; buyers are very wary, so anything that helps reassure them is welcome." **THR**



Nightcrawler

Prayer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

bond, and the duo soon find themselves being hunted across Europe. Their only hope of survival is to find out why her family was wiped out.

The project has sparked keen interest at AFM. Territories where the film has sold include Germany (Square One), Greece/India/Middle East/Turkey (Italia), Hong Kong/Taiwan (Sound Space), Iceland (Myndform), Israel (United Kingdom), Indonesia (PT Prima), Latin America (Sun Distribution), Malaysia/Vietnam (Roarlion), South Africa (Ster Kinekor), South Korea (Focus and Co.), Switzerland (Ascot Elite) and Thailand (Mongkol).

Mostow begins shooting the European-set action movie this week in Yorkshire in Northern England. Yorkshire will double for a number of international locations, including Switzerland, New York, Germany and Spain. **THR**

Friend

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

boy from Mexico.

Bron Studios and Fortitude International will co-finance the film in association with Creative Wealth Media Finance.

Friend also will produce *Barton & Charlie & Checco & Bill* together with **Aaron L. Gilbert** of Bron Studios and **Margot Hand**. Fortitude's **Nadine de Barros** and **Robert Ogden Barnum** and Creative Wealth's **Jason Cloth** are executive producers.

CAA packaged the movie and is handling domestic rights while Fortitude is doing international sales and introducing the project to buyers at AFM. **THR**



GREAT WALL
A GAME
CHANGER?

By Clifford Coonan

Le Vision Pictures CEO **Zhang Zhao** believes the \$135 million movie he currently is making, the **Zhang Yimou**-directed *Great Wall*, will be the biggest Chinese movie of all time and set the template for Hollywood-China co-productions for years to come.

"*Great Wall* is important. This is obviously the biggest Chinese movie ever. It's the first ever official big-budget co-production," Zhang Zhao told *THR* in an interview at the American Film Market.

Zhang Yimou, artistic director of LeVision, Zhang Zhao and Legendary East CEO **Peter Loehr** currently are casting the movie. Global distribution will take place through Universal Pictures and through China Film Group in China.

"If *Great Wall* has successful box office around the world, then that becomes the model. Hollywood will believe it more. It's a Chinese director and Chinese content, but the crew is from Hollywood. We can make a global movie in English and that becomes a template," said Zhang.

Asked what kind of genre *Great Wall* belongs to, Zhang said it was similar in scale to the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, famously orchestrated by **Zhang Yimou**.

"I don't know if the Olympics opening ceremony can be classified as a genre, but it's true — it's such a sensory experience for the global audience," he said. "In terms of viewership, it's bigger than any Hollywood movie ever before. It's very Chinese, but of course, the narrative is very western. The value statement is very western. It is a new direction." **THR**

'EVENT' FILM SCREENINGS HIT EUROPE

By Ariston Anderson

Audiences for art house cinema are constantly shrinking. The ways audiences consume films change almost daily. The challenges can be enough to force any distributor into early retirement. Enter Europa Distribution, a network and think tank of 140 independent distributors representing 28 countries in Europe and beyond.

Indie films in the U.K. face a particularly challenging marketplace: competition for screens, rising P&A costs, challenges in VOD profits and an extremely crowded theatrical marketplace (at least 17 films will be released on Dec. 5 alone). The BFI Distribution Fund's New Model awards provide distributors capital to experiment in alternative marketing. "This particular strand of funding was developed as a way of encouraging distributors to look at alternative solutions that may help address the challenges they are facing in finding wider audiences for many independent British and specialized films," said **Katie Ellen** of the BFI Distribution Fund.

Recent successes have included funding for Picturehouse's release of *20,000 Days on Earth*. The **Nick Cave** documentary tapped into the singer's huge fan base to market a major event screening at the Barbican featuring the man of the hour. They then capitalized on the strong word of mouth to increase theatrical screens beyond what a documentary would normally achieve. Total box office to date is \$865,000.

Italy also faces a particularly difficult environment, where piracy is destroying theatrical, video and VOD. **Stefano Massenzi**, head of acquisitions at Italy's Lucky Red, also has turned to the film-as-an-event distribution strategy. His company manages the famed Japanese animation Studio Ghibli catalog and has found huge success with one-shot event releases aimed at a specific group of fans. **Hayao Miyazaki's** last film *The Wind Rises* took in \$1.3 million in four days on 200 screens. **THR**

Dear White People Breaks Urban Curse

European and Asian buyers, often wary of films about African-American culture, have jumped at Justin Simien's Sundance hit *Dear White People* By Scott Roxborough

The cliché when it comes to films about African-American culture is that foreigners don't want to watch them. You would think that **Steve McQueen's** Oscar-winning *12 Years a Slave*, which grossed more than \$130 million outside North America, would have put that old saw to rest. But companies trying to sell films to the international distributors swarming the American Film Market in Santa Monica this week will tell you that nothing is harder to sell to buyers from Europe or Asia than one featuring African-American themes. Even **Tyler Perry's** blockbuster *Madea* films, which have earned more than \$700 million domestically, struggle to find foreign distributors willing to take them on.

So it's particularly surprising — and impressive — that **Justin Simien's** *Dear White People*, a film about African-American Ivy League students navigating the often treacherous waters of campus race relations, has been a



So far *Dear White People* has sold to France, Spain, Korea and Latin America.

global sales hit. **Brian O'Shea's** *The Exchange*, which is handling world sales for *Dear White People* at AFM, has closed multiple major territory deals for the Sundance hit, including for France, Spain, Korea and Latin America, with all English-speaking territories and Scandinavia set to go soon. O'Shea says rave reviews out of Sundance helped build momentum around *Dear White People* and the film's domestic box-office success sealed the deal.

Since its release last month through Roadside Attraction, the film has earned more than \$3 million.

"Given the price point of the film, that performance gave buyers the confidence to take a chance on the movie," O'Shea said. If *Dear White People* does as well internationally as it has at home, maybe the cliché about African-American films being global box-office poison will finally become a thing of the past. **THR**

Bleed for This Joins Icon Slate

By Scott Roxborough

British distributor Icon Film is ramping up its 2015 slate with the addition of **Ben Younger's** boxing drama *Bleed for This*.

Icon recently picked up **Shane Black's** detective thriller *The Nice Guys* starring **Ryan Gosling** and **Russell Crowe**, which Warner Bros. is releasing stateside, and **Noah Baumbach's** *While We're Young* starring **Ben Stiller** and **Naomi Watts**.

Bleed for This is a biopic, which Younger co-wrote, that looks at five-time world champion boxer **Vinny Pazienza**, who recovered from a near-fatal accident to return to triumph in the ring. **Miles Teller**, who will play Reed Richards/Mr. Fantastic in the upcoming *Fantastic Four* film, has signed on to play Pazienza, while *Game of Thrones* actor **Ciaran Hinds** has been cast as the boxer's father.

Other titles the recently relaunched Icon has nabbed for the U.K. include the family feature *A Bollywood Tale* and the thriller *6 Days*, about the siege of the Iranian Embassy in 1980. **THR**



Teller

HGC's Mindgate Heading to China

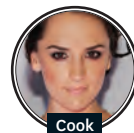
By Scott Roxborough

HGC Entertainment has picked up all Chinese rights to *Mindgate*, the new sci-fi film from Spanish production company Rebel Movies starring **Rachel Leigh Cook**.

It's the second big presale in as many days for *Mindgate*, which also was picked up by Falcom Media Group for German-speaking Europe.

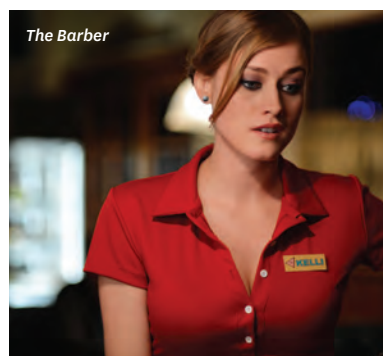
In the film, Cook will play Dr. Susan Hobbs, a brilliant neuropsychologist with Asperger's syndrome. She creates a technological link between herself and a quadriplegic patient, giving the patient the physical sensation of a sexual relationship and herself a connection to the patient's emotional life, something she, because of her condition, barely understands.

Spanish sci-fi writer **Juan Miguel Aguilera** penned the screenplay to *Mindgate* and will direct in his feature debut. The project is the first from Rebel Movies, who plan to announce the film's remaining cast at the European Film Market in Berlin. **THR**



Cook

AFM In Brief



ARC TAKES *THE BARBER* FOR THE U.S.

ARC Entertainment has picked up all U.S. rights to *The Barber*, a thriller from director Basel Owies starring Scott Glenn. The deal was said to be in the mid-six figure range. The plot has Glenn as a suspect in a murder case who is released due to insufficient evidence, prompting the detective who locked him up to kill himself in despair. Twenty years later, the detective's son tracks down the supposed killer, now working as a barber in a small town.

WAR PIGS MARCHES TO CINEDIGM

Cinedigm has taken North American rights to *War Pigs*, a WWII actioner featuring veteran tough guys Mickey Rourke and Dolph Lundgren, from VMI Worldwide. The plot has a rag-tag group of misfits on a secret mission behind enemy lines to find and capture a weapon being developed by Adolf Hitler and the SS.

SPLENDID IS BIG ON *LITTLEST REINDEER*

Germany's Splendid Films has picked up rights for Germany and Benelux for the 3D animated holiday feature *Elliot: The Littlest Reindeer* from Canadian sales outfit Double Dutch. Freeman Distribution, Monolith and Blitz Film also have picked up rights to Eastern Europe for the \$16 million production, which animator Paul Griffin (*Happy Feet Two*) is directing. *Elliot* tells the story of a tiny horse who wants to take his place pulling Santa's sleigh. **THR**

THE 2014 AFM POSTER AWARDS

THR pays tribute to the most amusing and over-the-top promotional materials from the year's market



Russia
Edition



JUST ASKING FOR LEGAL ACTION

Tresures of Lake Kaban

We know the poster says there's "no time to explain," but we're still curious how the companies who own the rights to Lara Croft, James Bond and Leeloo from *The Fifth Element* aren't collectively suing someone right now.



JUST BEING BRUTALLY HONEST

The Nannies

You might think plastic-wrapping your obnoxious teenage daughter to her suitcase is a form of child abuse, but in Russia it's called "preparing her for marriage."



JUST GUESSING BASED ON DEDUCTION

Elephant

We think the one-word title means "elephant" in Russian. It's either that or the Russian word for "pensive bearded man wearing a tank top with a blanket draped over his legs."



JUST DON'T LOOK THEM IN THE EYES!

Moms

We're not sure what this has to do with moms, but we do know those must be some seriously strange-looking actors if they felt the need to hide their faces on the poster. Wait a second ... is Steve Buscemi in this movie?!

Rachael Leigh Cook

Welcome aboard,
H.G.C. Entertainment
(China)

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EONE, PRESIDENT, FILM PRODUCTION

Xavier Marchand

The busy exec on adapting Irene Nemirovsky's beloved *Suite Francaise*, the sequel to *Woman in Black* and why he won't be seeing that other drone movie **By Pamela McClintock**

SLOW AND STEADY IS AN APT WAY TO describe Xavier Marchand's first 21 months as head of Entertainment One's new production efforts. The French-born Marchand arrived at the world's largest independent distributor in January 2013 after eOne bought rival Alliance, where Marchand, 49, and his team co-financed and co-produced such hits as *The King's Speech* and *Insidious*. Alliance also backed *The Woman in Black*, which helped define Daniel Radcliffe's post-*Harry Potter* star status. Known for his savvy eye, the London-based Marchand works closely with Benedict Carver, who serves as eOne's L.A.-based senior vp filmed entertainment. Marchand's mandate is to turn out a slate of films that feed eOne's massive distribution pipeline in the U.K., Canada, Australia, Spain and the Benelux, and then sell off foreign rights via eOne's new international sales operation, headed by Harold van Lier. The first pure in-house eOne title is Gavin Hood's drone drama *Eye in the Sky*, produced by Colin Firth and starring Helen Mirren, Aaron Paul, Alan Rickman and *Captain Phillips* star Barkhad Abi. *Eye in the Sky* has just finished shooting, so Marchand and his team may not have much footage to show buyers at AFM, but he and his team will be screening a finished cut of *Suite Francaise*, the film adaptation of Irene Nemirovsky's acclaimed posthumous novel starring Michelle Williams, Matthias Schoenaerts, Kristin Scott Thomas and Margot Robbie. Set in occupied France, the World War II drama tells the story of a woman who falls in love with a German soldier. (Nemirovsky, a prolific author, died at Auschwitz after being arrested by French authorities for being a Jew.) *Suite Francaise* was one of several projects Marchand brought with him from Alliance, a slate that also includes the *Insidious* and *Sinister* franchises (he spotted producer Jason Blum's talent early on and snagged a production deal with him), as well as Hammer Films' upcoming sequel *The Woman in Black: Angel of Death*. At AFM, Marchand will be touting eOne's new production deals with Hammer and, on the other end of the spectrum, a first-look deal with David Lancaster, whose credits include *Nightcrawler*, *Whiplash* and *Drive*. Entertainment One also has just come aboard to make *A Message From the King* with The Ink Factory, casting *Black Panther* actor Chadwick Boseman to star.



"You still only have a finite number of hours to make your film. There are so many moving parts," says Marchand, photographed by Chris Floyd on Aug. 22 at his office in London.

What is the release plan for *Suite Francaise*? Will it be an awards contender this year?

Irene Nemirovsky is a national treasure in France, so the intention is to have the world premiere either in France or London, depending upon talent availability. We are opening the film Jan. 23 in the U.K. and will do a BAFTA campaign. Irene was born in February 1903, so we really want to mark the anniversary.

Are you disappointed it won't be released by The Weinstein Co. in the U.S. in time for an awards campaign?

No, I think it is a very Eurocentric story, like *Atonement*, or dare I say, *The King's Speech*. It's the type of project our U.K. team loves to distribute. Also, it was a matter of timing for TWC, since the film was delivered so late.

The *Woman in Black* grossed \$127.7 million worldwide and stands as the most successful horror film of all time in the U.K., grossing \$34.6 million.

How will the sequel do without Radcliffe?

His character died at the end, and we've made a movie that takes place 40 years later in a completely different environment. We cast a wonderful up-and-coming young British actress named Phoebe Fox. We are very happy with the film. Relativity Media bought U.S. rights in September, and we are going day-and-date with the film on Jan. 2. I will meet with Relativity during AFM.

You made the two *Woman in Black* movies with Hammer. Can you give me any sense of what Hammer titles you are looking at from the Hammer library?

The only one I can talk about is a remake of the *The Abominable Snowman*, which Val Guest made in the 1950s.

You have a very eclectic slate so far, a mix of prestige films, elevated genre and horror films. How many

films would you like to do a year?

This year we are delivering a handful of films: *Women in Black*, *Eye in the Sky*, *Suite Francaise* and *Insidious 3*. We are almost finished with *Black*. Next year I'd love to make six to eight movies. Would we like to do movies like *Taken* and *Lucy*? Yes, but at the moment, we are concentrating on films under \$20 million. Some are much, much lower. You have to have really strong material to attract a cast. It's elevated.

What advantage does having built-in distribution in key markets like the U.K., Canada and Australia provide when deciding whether to go for it?

It's very helpful to be able to talk to our distribution territories, because they have an unfiltered view on the quality of a script. They aren't as necessarily focused on the cast as the foreign sales agent would be. And from a foreign sales standpoint, the fact that five very key distribution territories have given a thumbs-up on the project should be really inspiring to the other territories around the world. It should provide comfort. The last three markets have been pretty slim pickings in terms of what there is to acquire. It's even more of an incentive for eOne to leverage its platform and be a home for filmmakers. We are nimble and can move very quickly. I got the *Eye in the Sky* script from Gavin in March, and we went straight into preproduction.

Did you see Andrew Niccol's drone movie *Good Kill* in Toronto?

No. I am trying to stay away so that we make our own movie.

How do you and Benedict work together, being so far apart?

We spend a lot of time talking on the phone, both with each other and other people in the company. And I'm in Los Angeles much more. **THR**

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CHINA DOES SOME SEOUL SEARCHING

The Chinese film industry is aggressively courting South Korean filmmakers, but will censorship and cultural differences sour the partnership? **BY LEE HYO-WON**

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about how China is intent on learning as much as possible about the movie business from Hollywood. Now the No. 2 film industry in the world is setting its sights on South Korea. After all, despite a population of only 50 million, South Korea has the highest rate of movie watching in the world, with the average Korean catching four titles per year.

What's its secret? China would like to know, and a number of recent developments suggest the Chinese and South Korean film sectors are developing a very close, symbiotic relationship:

- In July, the culture ministries of the two countries signed a landmark agreement to treat co-productions as local films. This allows South Korean films to avoid China's quota of 34 imported films a year based on a revenue-share basis and Chinese releases to be ensured a showing in Korean theaters.

- In October, Showbox/Mediaplex, one of Korea's top three distributors, announced plans to open a branch in China, while Le Vision Pictures, the Chinese company behind such films as Zhang Yimou's *Coming Home*, announced it is prepping a Korean office. Both plan to launch in 2015.

- Also in October, China's Huace Film & TV invested \$52.7 million in top Korean investor-distributor Next Entertainment World, becoming its second-largest stakeholder. Chinese online services company Sohu.com poured \$15 million into Keyeast, the Korean entertainment agency behind such big regional stars as Kim Soo-hyun, to become its second-largest stakeholder. And Korean film production firm Spackman Entertainment Group recently acquired a local K-pop video production brand, Breakfast Film, in hopes of expanding its business presence in China.

- China's online media giants have begun eyeing Korean films following the success of local TV soaps in the mainland. Youku Tudou, the Chinese YouTube, has bought the exclusive online copyrights for CJ Entertainment's film output from 2014 to 2016. And iQiyi, a Netflix-like streaming service, acquired exclusive rights to 90 Korean titles from Lotte and international sales banner Finecut.

So far, the burgeoning relationship between China and South Korea seems like a match made in heaven. China, rich in capital but

lacking filmmaking experience, is reaching out to its neighbor with the more mature cinema culture, while Korea has found opportunity beyond its borders.

"The Korean film market needs to expand.

Working with China is the best way to make my dreams as a filmmaker come true," says director Kim Yong-hwa, whose 2013 film, *Mr. Go*, co-produced by Korea's Showbox/Mediaplex and China's Huayi Brothers, brought in \$16.73 million in China, twice as much as it

earned in Korean theaters.

"I believe that the Chinese film market will grow as big as Hollywood in the near future, so there will basically be another Hollywood," says Choi Yong-bae, CEO of Chunggeorahm Film. "But as much as it grew so large so fast, it's difficult to keep up with the manpower [needs]. Just like Hollywood often hires European directors and Australian actors, China will need a lot of Asian filmmakers. There is a noticeably greater interest in Korea, with lots of discussions about co-productions."

Illustration by
LARS LEETARU



Choi says he has received offers to create a Chinese remake of the 2006 Korean blockbuster *The Host*, directed by Bong Joon-ho (*Snowpiercer*), and is now discussing the project with potential Chinese partners.

Even Korean films that are not joint ventures can eye lucrative box office in the Chinese market: Korea's *The Admiral: Roaring Currents* recently secured more than 3,000 screens across China via China Film Group, according to Korean distributor CJ. The film, about a Korean admiral defeating 300-plus Japanese ships with just 12 vessels, is expected to resonate strongly with Chinese viewers given the country's historic animosity against Imperial Japan.

Unlike China, contemporary filmmaking in South Korea is extremely diverse and daring.

Kang Woo-suk, the producer-director behind some of Korea's most popular blockbusters, says one of the primary reasons Korean films have been successful with local audiences is because of their "daring audacity." He says: "During a

summit I attended recently, Chinese officials said they were shocked by the diversity of the subject matters in Korean films, and I believe this novelty factor is what makes Korean films so successful."

But will Chinese authorities accept the often dark and violent cinema of South Korean filmmakers? Indeed, censorship in China remains a creative hurdle that Korean filmmakers and scriptwriters must overcome. Some observers say the historic differences between the film cultures could become dodgy.

"We want to work with more Korean filmmakers, but it's problematic that many Korean movies have sad elements even if they're comedies, and Chinese audiences really like happy stories," says one spokesperson of a Chinese company seeking joint ventures with Korea.

Chinese censors balk at a range of subjects that routinely grace South Korean screens, such as extreme violence, the supernatural and graphic sex. Korean helmer Im Kwon-taek, who recently directed his 102nd film, says he is still trying to recover from the trauma of censorship restrictions from Korea's 1970s-'80s military regime. "It's been decades [since the censorship has disappeared], but I am always questioning myself, whether I've trapped myself inside the framework I've been used to working. This is something that takes a while to get over, and I'm sure it's similar in China," he says.

Adds a South Korean producer who asked not to be named: "One director who is famous for creating epic action films was deliberately asked to pen a happy ending for a drama that my company co-produced with China."

Yet things are changing, as they always are in China. While ghosts may still be banned, the *Bunshinsaba* franchise directed by Korean filmmaker Ahn Byeong-ki took in more than \$30 million at the Chinese box office, proving there is room for genre titles. Many also hope that the decentralized censorship process for local films — which will include Korean co-productions — will eventually help filmmakers work with more freedom.

Korean partners, however, need to meet their end of the business deal, says Won Dong-yeon, head of REALies Pictures. "For a long-lasting, win-win partnership, Korean companies need to make sure their Chinese partners can make money, too," says the producer, who is in talks with Chinese companies for a Chinese-language remake of 2006 hit rom-com *200 Pounds Beauty*. "We are planning to get Korean investors to make an equal contribution [as the Chinese investors]."

Says Soojin Jung, vp international business at Showbox/Mediaplex: "There are a lot of discussions of collaboration, and the two markets have really opened up to each other. But as much as there are advantages, there can be downsides as well, and so there is a need to think about entering the Chinese market in a more strategic way." **TJR**

4 SOUTH KOREAN STARS CROSSING OVER IN CHINA

Korean film and music stars have helped fuel the increasing number of exchanges between Korea's and China's film industries. Here are four of the top stars making an impact on the mainland.



KIM SOO-HYUN The most highly paid Korean actor in China, the 26-year-old has appeared in more than 40 Chinese commercials. China's Sohu recently became the second stakeholder of Kim's Korean agency Keyeast Entertainment and plans to pursue co-production projects featuring the actor.



JUN JI-HYUN Jun, 33, was one of the first Korean stars to gain pan-Asian popularity after the success of the 2001 rom-com *My Sassy Girl*. A sequel, *Meet Miss Anxiety*, is in production. It is the first Korea-China joint venture since the ratification of the two countries' co-production treaty in July.



SONG HYE-KYO One of the first Korean stars to thrive in Chinese productions alongside local stars, the 32-year-old held her own with Zhang Ziyi in *The Grandmaster* and plays lead roles in two major upcoming productions: John Woo's period epic *The Crossing* and *The Queens*, considered an Asian version of *Sex and the City*.



JANG GEUN-SUK Jang has become a major star in Korea, Japan and China for not only film and TV roles but also as a singer. The 27-year-old has more than 18.1 million followers on Weibo and was chosen by the Korean Film Council to be the honorary ambassador for its Korean film showcase in Beijing in August.



TODAY

8:45 AM AMC 7, *Black and White: The Dawn of Justice*, Ablaze Image, 126 mins.; AMC 6, *Labyrinth of Lies*, Beta Cinema, 121 mins.; AMC 1, *Teenakahon*, Little Lamb Films Pvt. Ltd., 124 mins.

9:00 AM Tunnel Post #1, *Captain Sabertooth and the Treasure of Lama Rama*,

Sola Media Gmbh, 90 mins.; Doubletree #1, *Fire*, Latido, 103 mins.; Broadway 2, *Get Santa*, Altitude Film Sales; Fairmont 1, *Kelly & Cal*, Electric Entertainment, 107 mins.; AMC 4, *Manhole*, Lotte Entertainment, 101 mins.; Broadway 1, *Ned Rifle*, Fortissimo Films, 85 mins.; Broadway 4, *Now Add Honey*, Lightning Entertainment;

Fairmont 2, *Rio I Love You*, Westend Films, 109 mins.; Broadway 3, *Santa Claus!*, Kinology; AMC 3, *Second Coming*, Protagonist Pictures, 105 mins.; Loews 2, *Suburban Gothic*, Red Sea Media Inc., 90 mins.; Fairmont 3, *Tell*, Arclight Films; Fairmont 4, *United Passions*, TF1 International, 100 mins.; Loews 2, *Buzzard*, Media Luna

New Films Ug, 97 mins.; AMC 3, *Camera*, Fortissimo Films, 90 mins.

11:00 AM Fairmont 3, *Dragon Nest: Warriors Dawn*, All Rights Entertainment Limited, 90 mins.; Loews 1, *Farah Goes Bang*, Angel Grace Productions, 90 mins.; AMC 2, *How to Make Love Like an Englishman*, The Solution Entertainment

Group, 100 mins.; Fairmont 4, *L.A. Slasher*, Archstone Distribution, 86 mins.; Broadway 2, *One Night in Istanbul*, The Little Film Co., 93 mins.; AMC 7, *Pressure*, Embankment Films Ltd., 90 mins.; Fairmont 5, *Stephen King's A Good Marriage*, Screen Media, 90 mins.; Broadway 4, *Streif*, Red Bull Media House, 110 mins.;



AMC 5, **The 108 Demon-Kings**, Europacorp; Fairmont 1, **The Hatching**, Phoenix Worldwide Entertainment; Broadway 1, **The Silent Storm**, Westend Films, 102 mins.; AMC 1, **To Life!**, Global Screen Gmbh, 86 mins.; Doubletree #2, **Torrente 5, Mission Eurovegas**, Filmsharks Int'l., 102 mins.; AMC 4, **Tour De Force**, Beta Cinema, 95 mins.; Loews 3, **Transgression**,

Wide, 100 mins.

1:00 PM, AMC 7, **Against the Sun**, Goldcrest Films International, 99 mins.; Fairmont 5, **Alex of Venice**, Screen Media; AMC 3, **Battle Scars**, Tricoast Worldwide, 96 mins.; Loews 1, **Beijing, New York**, Easternlight Films, 110 mins.; Fairmont 3, **Blood Moon**, Jinga Films,

90 mins.; Fairmont 1, **Coming In**, Global Screen Gmbh, 104 mins.; AMC 2, **Cub**, Kinology; Broadway 2, **Far From Men**, Pathe International (Fr), 90 mins.; Broadway 4, **Goodnight Mommy**, Films Distribution, 99 mins.; Loews 3, **Hostiles**, Wide; Fairmont 2, **Match**, Premiere Entertainment Group, 90 mins.; AMC 4, **Monsters Dark Continent**, Protagonist Pictures, 135 mins.; Loews 2, **Road to Your Heart**, Princ Films, 112 mins.; Broadway 3, **Samba**, Gaumont, 115 mins.; Fairmont 4, **The Curse of Downers Grove**, Myriad Pictures, 90 mins.; Doubletree #1, **The Pirate's Code**, Highland Film Group; AMC 5, **Will and Testament Tony Benn Film**, Praslin Pictures, 95 mins.

3:00 PM Broadway 4, **Atlantic.**, Fortissimo Films, 94 mins.; Loews 2, **Convict**, Carnaby International, 110 mins.; AMC 1, **Darker Than Night**, 6 Sales, 100 mins.; Tunnel Post #1, **El Americano 3D: The Movie**, Filmsharks Int'l.; AMC 3, **Frog Kingdom**, Golden Network Asia Ltd., 86 mins.; Fairmont 4, **June**, Raven Banner Entertainment; Fairmont 2, **Millionaire Dog**, Deaplaneta, 90 mins.; AMC 2, **Queen**, Applied Art Productions, 115 mins.; AMC 6, **Sword of Vengeance**, Protagonist Pictures; Ocean Scr #, **The Barber**, The Little Film Co., 95 mins.; Fairmont 1, **The Black Rider**, Pure Flix Entertainment, 98 mins.; Loews 3, **The Circle**, Wide, 101 mins.; Loews 1, **The Dead**, 2 Jinga Films, 94 mins.; Broadway 3, **The Eyes Diary**, Sahamongkolfilm International Co. Ltd., 100 mins.; Broadway 1, **The Farewell Party**, Beta Cinema; AMC 5, **The Gate**, Gaumont; Broadway 2, **The Great Gilly Hopkins**, Westend Films, 103 mins.; Fairmont 3, **The Last Knights**, Arclight Films; AMC 7, **The Legend of Longwood**, Global Screen Gmbh, 100 mins.; Doubletree #2, **They Are All Dead**, Latido, 93 mins.; Doubletree #1, **Wind Walkers**, Tricoast Worldwide, 85 mins.; AMC 4, **Yellowbird**

(3D), Sc Films International, 90 mins.

5:00 PM Loews 1, **Beltracchi**, Global Screen Gmbh, 104 mins.; Broadway 1, **Big Game**, Altitude Film Sales; Ocean Scr #, **Champs**, The Works International, 90 mins.; Fairmont 2, **Hidden in the Woods**, Wtfilms; AMC 5, **Last Summer**, Fortissimo Films, 90 mins.; Fairmont 1, **Last Weekend**, Aldamisa, 94 mins.; AMC 3, **October Gale**, Myriad Pictures; Broadway 4, **Ride**, 6 Sales, 93 mins.; AMC 4, **Savva**, Glukoza Production, 115 mins.; Fairmont 4, **Sparks & Embers**, Phoenix Worldwide Entertainment, 84 mins.; Loews 2, **Submerged**, Darclight Films; Doubletree #1, **The Face of an Angel**, Westend Films, 100 mins.; Loews 3, **The Gambler Wide**, 109 mins.; AMC 6, **The Last 5 Years**, The Exchange, 94 mins.; AMC 1, **The Lies of the Victors**, The Match Factory, 112 mins.; Doubletree #2, **Vengeance of an Assassin**, Sahamongkolfilm International Co. Ltd., 93 mins.; Fairmont 3, **Virus X**, Goliath Film & Media Holdings Inc., 85 mins.

7:00 PM Fairmont 5, **37: A Final Promise**, California Pictures Inc., 94 mins.; Fairmont 3, **Any Day**, Vmi Worldwide, 100 mins.; Fairmont 1, **Beloved Sisters**, Global Screen Gmbh, 138 mins.; Doubletree #2, **Dream Flight**, Encore Film Co. Ltd., 140 mins.; Fairmont 4, **The Better Angels**, Electric Entertainment, 95 mins.; Doubletree #1, **The Tenor Lirico Spinto**, More In Group, 121 mins.

NOV 10

9:00 AM AMC 5, **Comet**, Content Media Corp., 91 mins.; Ocean Scr #, **Eden**, Voltage Pictures, 115 mins.; AMC 6, **Kafka's The Burrow**, Beta Cinema, 110 mins.; Broadway 3, **Song of the Sea**, Westend Films, 90 mins.; AMC 3, **The Duke of Burgundy**, Protagonist Pictures

11:00 AM Loews 2, **Angel**, Darclight Films; Loews 1,

Doonby, Worldwide Film Entertainment LLC., 95 mins.; Fairmont 4, **Fear of Darkness**, Darclight Films, 90 mins.; Fairmont 1, **Ghadi**, Fortissimo Films, 100 mins.; Broadway 4, **Gloria! The Price of Fame**, 6 Sales, 100 mins.; AMC 2, **Manglehorn**, Westend Films, 97 mins.; Fairmont 2, **Metamorphoses**, Mk2 S.a, 102 mins.; Loews 3, **Posthumous**, Bleiberg Entertainment LLC., 93 mins.; Broadway 1, **Streif**, Red Bull Media House, 110 mins.; AMC 4, **Superbob**, Genesis Film Sales; Broadway 2, **The Ignorance of Blood**, Latido, 109 mins.; Fairmont 3, **The Magic Brush**, All Rights Entertainment Ltd., 87 mins.; AMC 7, **The Snow Queen II: The Snow King**, Wizart Animation, 80 mins.

1:00 PM Loews 1, **A Play On Words**, John Stark Productions, 90 mins.; Loews 2, **Assassin Carnaby**, International, 90 mins.; Fairmont 2, **Take Care**, 13 Films

3:00 PM Fairmont 3, **American Beach House**, New Films Intl., 95 mins.; Broadway 2, **Big Game**, Altitude Film Sales; Fairmont 2, **Boonie Bears to the Rescue! (International Version)**, All Rights Entertainment Ltd., 94 mins.; Loews 1, **Chasing Taste**, Aspire Talent Management, 89 mins.; AMC 6, **Gemma Boverly**, Gaumont; Fairmont 1, **Last Weekend**, Aldamisa, 94 mins.; AMC 4, **Learning to Drive**, Westend Films, 105 mins.; Loews 2, **Like Sunday, Like Rain**, Vmi Worldwide, 104 mins.; Loews 3, **My Name Is Nobody**, Little Books Little Films LLC., 115 mins.; AMC 2, **Oil Painting**, First Hollywood Production, 97 mins.; Broadway 4, **On Any Sunday**, Red Bull Media House, 95 mins.; AMC 1, **Rats**, Uglichin and Co., 90 mins.; Broadway 1, **The Great Gilly Hopkins**, Westend Films, 103 mins.

5:00 PM Ocean Scr #, **Harbinger Down**, The Exchange

7:00 PM Ocean Scr #, **Lost Birds**, Kara Kedi Film, 120 mins.



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REVIEWS



Bar-Lev examines a scandal-rocked community.

Happy Valley

Amir Bar-Lev's involving doc, which looks at the reaction of football fans to the Penn State child sex abuse scandal, is more interested in emotions than facts BY JOHN DEFORE

LESS AN INVESTIGATION INTO OR COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY of the Penn State child sex abuse scandal than a look at the feelings it elicited, Amir Bar-Lev's *Happy Valley* is more concerned with the phenomenon of team spirit than any single question of fact or moral judgment. A level-headed look at the way this community clumsily tried to reconcile loyalty to longtime head football coach Joe Paterno with revulsion at the crimes of his assistant Jerry Sandusky, the film won't reveal much to those who followed the story in the news. Those who come to it with little or no knowledge may suspect, with some justification, that they aren't getting the fullest picture possible of the case that triggered this crisis.

While some of the voids here are predictable (Sandusky, convicted of 52 counts of child molestation, is absent, as is his wife, Dottie), others suggest a doc with minimal interest in journalistic investigation. The doc does not include, for instance, anyone in Penn State's administration nor prosecutors who might have shed light on the chronology of the legal case against Sandusky. Instead, Bar-Lev interviews a superfan of the university's football team, whose dorm walls are covered with pictures of Paterno, and a film professor at the school, who (while offering little insight into administrative decisions) has interesting things to say about the culture of sports fandom at a school like this, which he compares to with-us-or-against-us nationalism.

The filmmaker's biggest get is access to Sandusky's adopted son, Matt, who dramatically changed his story during the trial. In a thoughtful

interview, he describes how life-changing it was for an impoverished kid (brought up in a house with around 15 children but no running water and no toilets) to be taken under the wing of the second-most-revered coach in a coach-crazy town. He recalls telling investigators flatly that Sandusky never abused him, then, on the trial's first day, having an epiphany: "I knew 'Victim Four,'" he says. Hearing the accuser's story made him feel like a coward for saying nothing about his own molestation.

Happy Valley isn't interested in the details of how charges brought by Sandusky's anonymous victims took so long to lead to an indictment or in how the case against him was proved. The film takes for granted his sudden status as a local pariah and focuses instead on how this all affected "Saint Joe," the coach who spent six decades building a program associated with ethics and academic achievement. Giving ample time to two of Paterno's sons and his wife, the film acknowledges the allegations against him — that Paterno had known of the abuse for years and did much less than he could have to stop it — but leaves out some details that might lead viewers to side with those who believe Paterno tended to his own interests at the expense of innocent boys. No mention is made, for example, of the fact that Paterno began planning a well-paid exit from his coaching career as soon as he learned prosecutors were investigating Sandusky. It also ignores a public statement Paterno made, as his firing became increasingly likely, to announce his retirement.

Instead, the film presents Penn State's decision to fire him as a shock. "Didn't we deserve more?" asks wife Sue Paterno.

The narrative that interests Bar-Lev is one told with easily obtained footage of public outcry. Hordes of fans are shown outside the Paterno home at the time of his firing, cheering for him and, with chants of "f—the media," suggesting outsiders were to blame for all his problems. The film also features the riot that followed, with a news van turned on its side by fans who attempted to set it ablaze. In the aftermath of the ouster and Paterno's death, there are angry confrontations between Paterno loyalists and detractors at a statue (later removed by the university) honoring him.

Viewed only as a chronicle of Penn State's changing emotional climate during this period, and its attempt to keep old loyalties alive during a trying time, *Happy Valley* has value, despite the fact the film never asks if there's a segment of this community that has no stake at all in football or celebrity coaches. And perhaps it's fitting, given prevailing local sentiments, that the film is more generous to Paterno than a dispassionate observer might be.

Bar-Lev has told journalists he's interested in documentaries that "are exercises in holding opposing viewpoints at one time." In a morally complex world (and one in which some facts remain unknowable), such exercises are often useful. But they're most productive when each viewpoint is represented as thoroughly as the others.

Director Amir Bar-Lev // 98 minutes



Girlhood

Newcomer Karidja Toure makes a mesmerizing impression as a teen drawn into a Paris-area girl gang in Celine Sciamma's expertly judged drama **BY DAVID ROONEY**

FRENCH WRITER-DIRECTOR CELINE Sciamma brought empathetic observation and emotional insight to high school girls coming of age in her 2007 debut, *Water Lilies*, and to a preteen girl's instinctual exploration of gender identity in 2011's *Tomboy*. Her gorgeous third feature, *Girlhood* (*Bande de Filles*), combines variations on those themes and takes them in bracing new directions, reflecting on the paths of "girlz n the hood" — in this case the projects of suburban Paris — with tenderness, honesty and a rigorous avoidance of sentimentality. Driven by a magnetic central performance from stunning newcomer Karidja Toure, this film looks to make a significant splash on the international art house radar.

It has been almost 20 years since Mathieu Kassovitz's trenchant foray into a tough outer-Parisian banlieue in *La Haine*, and on many levels, there are parallels with the ethnically mixed, economically disadvantaged underclass examined in Sciamma's film. But while *La Haine* was fueled by its visceral rawness and violent intensity, *Girlhood* is a thoughtful, far more intimate portrait of characters whose toughness doesn't exclude vulnerability, humor or even sweetness. There have been countless views of urban life and its limited prospects in movies, but the gaze here feels entirely fresh.

Sciamma and her cinematographer, Crystel Fournier, capture with spot-on specificity the milieu of these girls: the slab concrete-block

architecture of the apartment buildings where they live; the mall at Les Halles where they go to hang out and shoplift; and the square at La Defense where they dance to hip-hop music in the shadow of the Grande Arche. And yet these characters and their behavior are as imminently recognizable as teens from, say, New York or London.

Anyone who regularly rides subways in a large metropolis has probably experienced nervous moments when teenage girls get loud and volatile, egging one another on and getting in the face of other passengers. But Sciamma gets beyond the badass posturing and anger to show what's ticking away underneath. Her approach is both smart and disarming.

Set to punchy electropop by Para One, the terrific opening takes place at the end of an American football match at night between two girls' teams of mostly black players. Helmeted and uniformed with massive shoulder pads, the girls look like gladiators, which cleverly establishes the theme of young women eager to explore personas beyond the conventional roles assigned to them.

Sixteen-year-old Marieme (Toure) returns home from the match, and there is casual evidence of her affectionate relationship with her two younger sisters, while their surly brother, Djibril (Cyril Mendy), keeps to himself and his street crew. Their mother is mostly absent doing night-shift cleaning work. A flirtation between

Marieme and Ismael (Idrissa Diabate) is kept on hold due to the boy's fear of showing disrespect to Djibril.

When she learns that her grades are not good enough to continue high school, Marieme falls in with a gang of three local girls, led with cool authority by Lady (Assa Sylla). She watches them shyly from the sidelines at first, but soon becomes immersed in their slacker routines, changing her dress code, swapping her braids for a more glam look and helping to fund their fun time by fleecing her former schoolmates for cash. Lady gives her the gang name Vic.

Sciamma gets superbly naturalistic performances from her nonprofessional cast, in particular the four-girl gang — Adiatou (Lindsay Karamoh) and Fily (Marietou Toure) round out the group — all of whom show distinct personalities and defining attitudes. In the film's exhilarating high point, they stock up on booze, pot, snacks and stolen fly-girl outfits and check in to a hotel, singing along to Rihanna's "Diamonds" at the peak of their partying. It's a beautiful scene of giddy empowerment that also hints at the melancholy uncertainty of where their lives are headed. That note is subtly amplified as the action progresses in a fluid succession of episodic scenes.

The group dynamic shifts when Lady takes a humiliating beating from a rival girl-gang leader, and Vic doles out the payback. That gains her the newfound respect of Djibril when word gets around. But exposure of her incipient relationship with Ismael underscores the constricting rules for women, which are no less apparent when Vic starts selling drugs for another local crew.

With its sharp, composed look and elegant tracking shots, this handsomely made film removes any distance between the audience and the protagonist. It loses a little momentum in the later action and could perhaps be tightened by five or 10 minutes, but Sciamma's deep personal investment in her characters and their world keeps it riveting, refreshingly steering it away from predictable tragic developments toward a more ambiguous conclusion. Whereas many filmmakers would have underlined the bleaker, harsher aspects, *Girlhood* presents the characters' grim reality without surrendering its lightness of touch, compassion or hope.

As delicate and memorable as *Tomboy* was, *Girlhood* is a major step forward that marks Sciamma as a singular talent. And Toure, in the lead role, is a real find. Solemn and self-possessed at times and joyously unguarded at others, Marieme/Vic visibly hardens herself as she struggles to figure out whom she wants to be, while never quite concealing the fragile girl inside.

Sales Films Distributor

Cast Karidja Toure, Assa Sylla, Lindsay Karamoh, Marietou Toure

Director Celine Sciamma // 112 minutes

The Silent Storm

Cursed with a score that's not silent enough, this risible British love-triangle drama is one to avoid **BY LESLIE FELPERIN**



Lewis is a strapping minister who doesn't practice what he preaches.

THE SILENT STORM IS a British drama written and directed by Corinna McFarlane (*Three Miles North of Molkom*), set on a remote Scottish island in the late 1940s. One would think with two such estimable actors as Andrea Riseborough (*Birdman*) and Damian Lewis (TV's *Homeland*) onboard, along with an admired director of photography (Ed Rutherford), not much could go wrong. Alas, a lot has gone wrong.

Inept direction and writing sets off a domino effect of wrongness that clacks through all aspects of the film, from the acting to the music and editing. The universe and the film business are cruel enough to ensure that this film will likely surface in theatrical distribution, but for the sake of many of the reputations involved, it would be kinder left in obscurity.

The action unfolds sometime after World War II, on an unnamed, thinly populated island. With the local mine closing down, the population is about to get even thinner as residents leave seeking employment on the mainland. The local Protestant minister Balor McNeil (Lewis), however, is loath to budge, having enjoyed immense power over his flock, whom he browbeats ferociously into obeying his brand of Calvinist conformity. He advises one congregant (Kate Dickie), for example, that she should stay with her violent husband regardless of his behavior, a logical position for Balor given he treats his wife,

Aislin (Riseborough), a non-native of mysterious origin, with similar emotional and physical abuse.

When a sensitive young offender from Glasgow named Fionn (newcomer Ross Anderson) is sent to be fostered by Balor and Aislin, Balor gives him the hardest chores to do on the family's croft, lectures him on morality and confiscates his poetry books. Aislin, on the other hand, treats Fionn with kindness and helps him to appreciate the beauty of the island.

When Balor is overcome with an irresistible urge to take off his shirt, dismantle the local kirk and take all its pews and possessions to another church on the mainland, it necessitates a dangerous journey by boat. This leaves Aislin and Fionn alone on the island. Soon, picnics by the seaside and backstory revelations inspire Aislin to wash her hair for a change and wear brighter sweaters, and that can only lead to no good.

Poor Riseborough tries hard to square the circle emotionally, but the material defeats her. Lewis likewise throws himself into his role with manic, goggle-eyed hysteria that's painful to watch.

By far the worst element is the choral-soaked bombastic score that desperately tries to imbue the proceedings with unearned poignancy.

Sales Westend Films

Cast Andrea Riseborough, Damian Lewis, Ross Anderson

Director Corinna McFarlane
98 minutes



Last Weekend

The real estate lust outweighs the emotional rewards, but this minor-key ensemble drama starring Patricia Clarkson is sleek and absorbing **BY DAVID ROONEY**

IMAGINE THAT CATE Blanchett's *Blue Jasmine* character had been evicted from her bubble of privilege not by calamity and public humiliation, but by the veil of melancholy that descends with fraying family bonds and the encroaching awareness that the sun is setting on life's most joyous moments. That more or less describes the character played with dry humor and complexity by Patricia Clarkson in *Last Weekend*. Restrained and elegant to a fault, this first feature from co-directors Tom Dolby and Tom Williams is too muted in its catharsis and too overcrowded with superfluous characters to be fully satisfying, but the delicate central performance keeps it watchable.

Dolby's screenplay wears its influences quite transparently, from Woody Allen to Chekhov. And with its fetishistic attention to sumptuous living, the film almost could be the indie equivalent of Nancy Meyers lifestyle porn.

Clarkson plays Celia Green, the well-heeled wife of San Francisco fitness magnate Malcolm (Chris Mulkey). Looking to recapture her family's carefree past, she painstakingly curates an idyllic Labor Day weekend for her adult sons, Theo (Zachary Booth) and Roger (Joseph Cross), to remember the gorgeous Lake Tahoe house where they grew up spending their summers. Rather than actually engage with their lives or give serious attention to their partners, however, Celia is more worried about finding the perfect sunflowers for the dinner table or whether she has bought enough salmon. It's a credit to Clarkson's nuanced exploration of character that she can make this vaguely daffy, head-in-the-clouds aesthete sympathetic.

The conflict, soft as it is, stems from Celia's pained decision to sell the house, a step she isn't quite ready to share with her offspring. Neither Theo nor Roger shows much nostalgia for that past, unlike



Booth (left) and Clarkson as son and mother.

their mother, whose self-absorption irks them in different ways. Theo has brought along Luke (Devon Graye), his pretty boyfriend of three weeks, whose humble roots make him nervous around so much wealth. Roger is dealing with his own anxieties, having lost his job in finance through a colossal blunder. Other characters pass in and out of the action in the populous country-house literary tradition, rather than serving any real purpose.

Last Weekend saunters along emulating the cool jazzy strains of Stephen Barton's score, and cinematographer Paula Huidobro

maximizes the visual appeal of the beautiful locations and the Greens' magnificent estate, bathed in soft natural light. Well-acted and never less than absorbing, the film has its share of both understated humor and affecting moments. But what it's missing is bite. The impression is that Dolby likes his characters too much to regard them with a critically detached eye.

Sales *Aldamisa*

Cast Patricia Clarkson, Chris Mulkey, Zachary Booth, Joseph Cross
Directors Tom Dolby, Tom Williams //94 minutes

The Dead Lands

Set in the Maori world of precolonial New Zealand, Toa Fraser's dazzling action-adventure is a voyage through a time of violent emotions **BY DEBORAH YOUNG**

THE FIRST EXOTIC ACTION-ADVENTURE liberally doused in bloodshed, *The Dead Lands* (*Hautoa*) chronicles a young man's search for "repayment" after his father and tribe have been brutally murdered by savage intruders. It's a remarkable film experience in several ways. The first point is the respect director Toa Fraser and screenwriter Glenn Standring accord the Maori people and their traditions. Shot entirely in the Maori language, it creates a primal world populated by the living and the dead. Performances are intensely involving as the fiery cast, not all of whom are Maori, spit out their lines with Shakespearean passion. Finally, it introduces a new martial art form to the screen, armed fighting with deadly paddles, in battle scenes staged in breathtaking acrobatics. The high level of testosterone unleashed in these combat sequences points to a young male audience, but the visuals and the acting are rich enough to capture the fancy of any viewer who tunes in to fantasy-adventure.

Unlike Mel Gibson's 2006 *Apocalypto*, which

was set during the collapse of the Mayan civilization in Mesoamerica, *The Dead Lands* avoids historical inaccuracy by unfolding in some distant, precolonial time.

Posturing as a great warrior whose only thought is the glory that will come to him when he avenges his ancestors, bad boy Wirepa (New Zealand TV star Te Kohe Tuhaka) strides into the hero's village and uses his unburied ancestors as an excuse to declare war. That night, the good chieftain is beheaded and the entire tribe murdered. The lone survivor is the



Violence and vendettas abound in *The Dead Lands*.

chief's "stupid" son Hongi (James Rolleston). To the wailing women who mourn their men, he declares his intention to kill Wirepa. Even his dead grandmother laughs at him from the afterlife: He's only 15 and unskilled in arms. But he announces he will seek the help of the monster who lives in the Dead Lands, a fearsome creature who slays anyone on his property.

Though branded as a coward because he survived the slaughter, Hongi tracks down the mean, ugly warrior-monster (Lawrence Makoare) to take part in his vendetta.

Fraser (*Naming Number Two*) shows great confidence on the directing side. Cinematography by Leon Narbey is nothing short of sumptuous, giving the action a mythic-world dimension. The characters are all well-drawn and acting is tough, iconic and credible, particularly the mask-like Makoare. On another level, Rolleston makes a noble, preternaturally calm everyboy intent on his coming-of-age quest, improving in skillful fighting and gaining in maturity scene by scene until the final showdown.

Sales *XYZ Films*

Cast James Rolleston, Lawrence Makoare, Te Kohe Tuhaka
Director Toa Fraser
108 minutes

The Face of an Angel

A filmmaker investigates the murder of British student Meredith Kercher in Michael Winterbottom's elusive new movie

BY DEBORAH YOUNG



Delevingne (left) and Bruhl ponder mysteries.

THE WORLDWIDE INTEREST in the case of Meredith Kercher, the English student murdered in 2007 while on a study year in Italy, turned into a media circus of sickening proportions, while the victim herself was largely forgotten, opines director Michael Winterbottom in *The Face of an Angel*. Instead of making the kind of juicy true-crime reenactment that would have been a surefire draw, he opts in true Winterbottom fashion to search for a deeper meaning. He forgoes all but a cursory account of Meredith's murder and her suspected killers, preferring to describe the aftermath of the murder, the media frenzy and the girl whose young life was truncated.

Everything is seen through the eyes of a sensitive filmmaker obsessed with Dante, who has been commissioned to make the commercial film that Winterbottom won't make.

It's hard to even describe this wisp of a film, and audiences are likely to feel alternately intrigued and frustrated as they struggle to puzzle it out. A bankable name cast — Daniel Bruhl, Kate Beckinsale and Cara Delevingne as a pretty party girl — should help attract viewers to a certain extent, but this is self-reflexive cinema and high-art country.

The film is dedicated "to the memory of Meredith Kercher, 1985-2007," and this is the only direct reference to the real people in the case (the suspects Amanda

Knox, Raffaele Sollecito and Rudy Guede are referred to by different names). Winterbottom and screenwriter Paul Viragh reference the first book that came out on the events in Perugia, written by American expat journalist Barbie Latza Nadeau, who becomes the character Simone Ford (Beckinsale) in the film.

The hero of the tale and Winterbottom's fictional alter ego is Thomas Lang (Bruhl), a director who has been commissioned by British TV to shoot a film on the hot subject. When he gets to Italy to research the project, he realizes that the evidence is so contradictory that the murder can never be solved, and in any case, a single truth doesn't exist. This leads to much soul-searching and wheel-spinning.

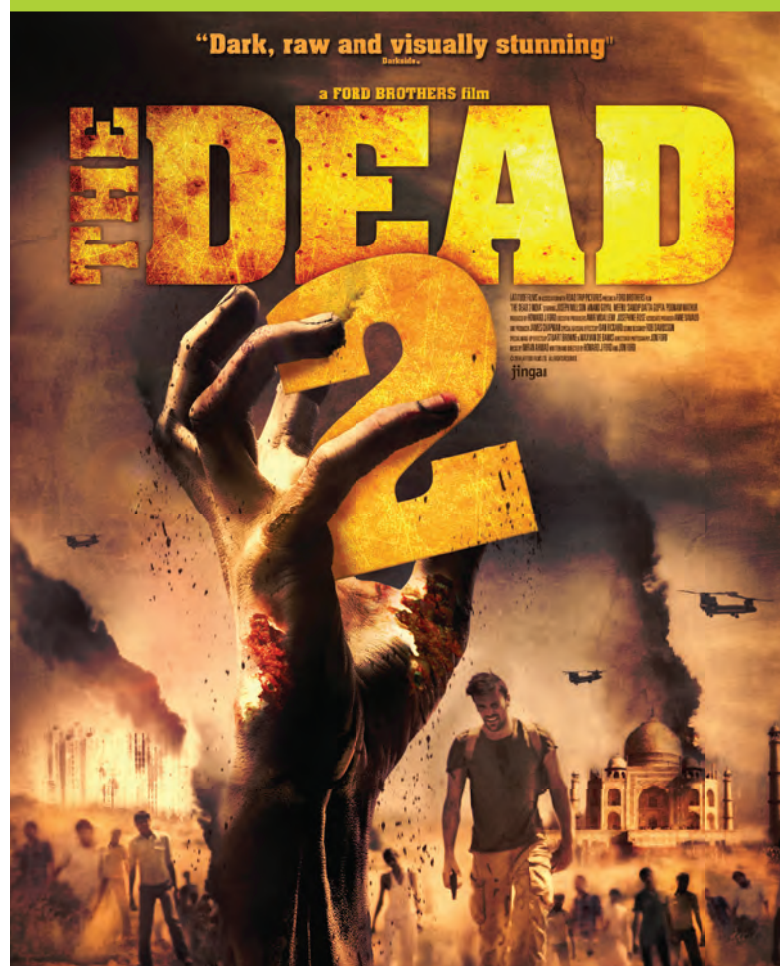
There are some good things in the swiftly moving narrative, filmed with a handheld camera to give it a documentary look. Wandering through the narrow medieval streets of the city, the hero is assailed by ghostly voices and monsters in moments of coked-up paranoia. Harry Escott's score heightens the poetic-exotic atmosphere of Hubert Taczanowski's lensing, particularly in the final scenes, which read more like a tone poem than narrative.

Sales Westend Films // **Cast** Daniel Bruhl, Kate Beckinsale, Valerio Mastrandrea, Cara Delevingne
Director Michael Winterbottom
105 minutes

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The Better Angels

A.J. Edwards' feature debut is a beautiful, arty, very Malick-influenced evocation of Abraham Lincoln's childhood

BY TODD MCCARTHY

THE SHADOW OF PRODUCER Terrence Malick looms heavily over writer-director A.J. Edwards' feature debut, *The Better Angels*. This meticulously researched, lyrically filmed evocation of a significant transitional period in the boyhood of Abraham Lincoln relies far more upon impressionistic glimpses of rough Indiana farm life, circa 1817-19, than upon conventionally scripted and staged dramatic scenes as it endeavors to convey key factors in the formation and growth of the future president's character.

As impressive as it is in many ways, the film is so beholden to Malick that it comes across as a work at once freshly conceived and bluntly imitative.

Edwards is as well versed in Malick's methods as it is possible to be, and the influence is immediately felt in the swirling, darting, deep-focus cinematography, the preference for voiceover commentary instead of extended

dialogue and the extensive use of classical music.

With narration derived from the text of an actual interview with Lincoln's last surviving cousin, Dennis Hanks, *The Better Angels* begins with brief shots of the Lincoln Memorial, then plunges itself down into a bucolic swath of forest and farmland where the impoverished Lincolns have settled after leaving Kentucky.

Much of cinematographer Matthew J. Lloyd's monochromatic work is very beautiful to observe, as it devotes itself to portraying the glories and hardships of isolated farm life. Gradually, some of the individuals onscreen are identified. Dominant is Tom Lincoln (Jason Clarke), a stern disciplinarian of very few words who repeatedly takes the whip to his 8-year-old son, Abe (Braydon Denney), who is already showing signs of preferring book learning to physical labor. "He's got a gift," someone is heard saying. Still, he is put to work



Kruger (center) takes on the role of Lincoln's stepmother.

tilling and sowing, chopping wood and hunting with his dad.

Although this life has its idyllic aspects, its overbearing toughness and uncertainties prevail. Despair sets in when cows begin to die mysteriously, then suddenly Abe's mother, Nancy (Brit Marling), takes ill and expires as well. Leaving Abe and older sister Sarah (McKenzie Blankenship) alone on the isolated farm, Tom departs for Kentucky, from which, at length, he returns with a new wife of surpassing beauty, Sarah (Diane Kruger).

Thanks to its indelible imagery and dedication to what could be termed lyrical realism, *The Better*

Angels notably succeeds in creating a vivid impression of the physical and familial circumstances that crucially shaped the heart and mind of the future 16th president, which was certainly the filmmakers' central goal.

Much basic information is passed over in favor of pure cinema. But the film provides a more vivid sense of this sort of 19th century childhood than most people would have had before.

Sales *Electric Entertainment*
Cast Jason Clarke, Diane Kruger, Brit Marling, Wes Bentley
Director A.J. Edwards
94 minutes

Big Game

Samuel L. Jackson plays a U.S. president being hunted in the Finnish mountains in Jalmari Helander's enjoyably ludicrous rescue tale BY JOHN DEFORE

THE LEADER OF THE FREE WORLD IS IN the hands of a Finnish 13-year-old in *Big Game*, Jalmari Helander's actioner ranging through the wooded mountains of Northern Finland. If the notion of Samuel L. Jackson playing a U.S. president seems like a stretch, your Spidey-sense is working: Despite some fairly impressive production values, this is Corman-esque pulp through and through, with a high-caliber cast — can that really be Jim Broadbent as America's most senior CIA analyst? — barely pretending their roles are for real. Often hilarious and even a tiny bit moving, the romp deserves some theatrical play.

Helander (2010's *Rare Exports*) starts off on the day a boy is to become a man: Oskari (Onni Tammila), son of an accomplished hunter, is ceremonially sent off into the woods alone to kill his first beast. But as the boy is just settling into his camp for the night, the fiery wreckage of Air Force One tears through the trees.

It seems that either someone tampered with Air Force One's security measures, allowing it



Jackson (right) has to rely on Tammila.

to be shot down by a terrorist's surface-to-air missile, or there were snakes in that plane's circuitry. In either case, only the president survived, having been dropped from the plane in an escape pod at the last moment. The terrorists know he's alive, and that's the plan: Their leader, wearing jodhpurs and an SS-style leather jacket, wants to shoot him up close so he can have his kill stuffed and mounted.

Back in D.C., the situation room looks like something a rural Finnish 13-year-old might imagine. Four very important government

people whose roles are vague (one, played by Victor Garber, is addressed as "Vice President" — and I don't mean "Mister Vice President") lead subordinates in their attempt to locate the wreckage. Broadbent chomps a sandwich as he assesses things. Felicity Huffman bosses around underlings.

But this outrageous fakeness is part of the fun and is more than echoed back in the mountains, where the laws of physics are treated with about as much seriousness. After Oskari finds the escape pod and is made to understand the preciousness of its cargo, the boy, who asks to be called "Ranger," promises to keep him safe. Jackson looks like he can hardly believe the movie he's in, but he goes where he's told.

Tammila steals the film, and not in a cute-little-tyke way. It's more that this is clearly his world, and these characters out of a *White House Down* ripoff can't help but seem trivial in comparison. Viewers will care less about whether the president dies than whether Oskari will be seen as the action hero he is by his father.

Sales *Altitude Film Sales*
Cast Samuel L. Jackson, Onni Tammila, Victor Garber, Felicity Huffman, Jim Broadbent
Director Jalmari Helander
90 minutes

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8 Decades of *The Hollywood Reporter*

The most glamorous and memorable moments from a storied history



In 1984, Blair attended the opening night of AFM at L.A.'s Beverly Center. She had two films out that year, the thrillers *Night Patrol* and *Savage Streets*.

Linda Blair Spun Her Head to Fame

WITH ONE HEAD-SPINNING role, Linda Blair, a child model raised in Westport, Conn., who'd had a small part on a daytime soap opera, found herself nominated for a best supporting actress Oscar at the age of 15. She'd go on to lose to another young actress, *Paper Moon*'s 10-year-old Tatum O'Neal, but her role as the demon-possessed Regan in 1973's *The Exorcist* would haunt moviegoers for decades.

When the film came out in late December 1973, audiences lined up around the block for the privilege of being terrified by the sight of Regan projectile vomiting, levitating and rotating her head 360 degrees. *Exorcist* earned \$66 million in its first release (to date it has grossed more than \$400 million worldwide) and was nominated for 10 Oscars including best picture — all this despite being panned by *THR*, which called it “the wretched excess of the year, a dubious achievement at best.”

In fact, director William Friedkin's “dubious achievement” would prove a game changer for the horror genre, made all the more memorable by Blair, who had been chosen from among 600 actresses. “The moment she walked in the door, I knew she was the one,” Friedkin told *THR* in 2013. “She was bright, effervescent.”

These days, Blair, 55, who starred in dozens of thrillers throughout the '80s and '90s, runs the Linda Blair Worldheart Rescue Foundation, an animal-rights organization. She'll next be seen in the fantasy film *The Green Fairy*, due out in 2015. — OLIVIA NILAND

Monday, December 24, 1973

THE *Hollywood Reporter*

MOVIE REVIEW

The Exorcist

The screen version of “The Exorcist,” produced by William Peter Blatty who adapted his novel, and directed by William Friedkin, is everything the filmmakers want it to be — an obscene abomination, a confrontation with the demonic forces of evil, an experience of the most fiendish special effects ever designed for a movie. It may also be the most frightening movie ever made and sitting through it is sheer hell.

going to die and urinates on the carpet. Her condition worsens. Doctors, then psychiatrists are consulted. Blatty's dialogue makes the unbelieving medical experts sound like morons, like actors reading textbook material, and Friedkin isn't content to display his sorcery with the child's possession. The gruesome hospital tests she undergoes are staged in nauseating, chilling detail.

As the possession increases, “The Exorcist” throws the audience to the lions. She gains superhuman strength, attacking to her

THE EXORCIST

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the FOREIGN LANGUAGE Race

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ISSUE

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